

Senator Phil Fortunato



Sen. Phil Fortunato

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Senate Committees:

- Housing & Local Government
(Ranking Member)
- Environment, Energy & Technology
- Transportation

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Greetings Friends,

My job is to represent you and I take that work seriously. Whether it's outlandish and costly environmental policies or restrictions on our constitutional rights, I take to heart the correspondence from constituents about issues being debated and vote accordingly.

From my perspective, this was one of the worst sessions I've experienced, namely due to the significant number of bills that infringe on personal freedoms and add to the mounting costs for taxpayers in our state. With record inflation taking more out of the family budget, this was a year the Legislature should have made financial relief for working families a priority, especially with the near \$15,000,000,000 state revenue surplus.

In the past, I have avoided blatantly partisan statements about what's happening in the Legislature, instead voicing my displeasure with actions by the "majority party." However, this year we've reached a tipping point and the flagrant abuses compel me to not mince words. You deserve to know who is responsible for the policies that adversely affect your livelihoods and your family's income.

The Democratic majority alone decided to increase state spending by 20 percent in this year's supplemental budget, spending billions on more than 1,000 new programs, instead of providing any sort of relief after two years of economic hardships for working families. I fought for property tax relief, generous sales tax relief, and more. With all of the unexpected taxes collected, we could have provided meaningful and sustainable financial relief while maintaining investments in critical services for our state's most vulnerable.

I believe that taxpayers should see some benefit for what their state government is spending their money on. On critical issues like the long-term care tax, public safety, the environment, housing and more, legislative Democrats have kicked the can down the road or continued failed policies that make our state even more unaffordable, government less accountable, and our communities unsafe.

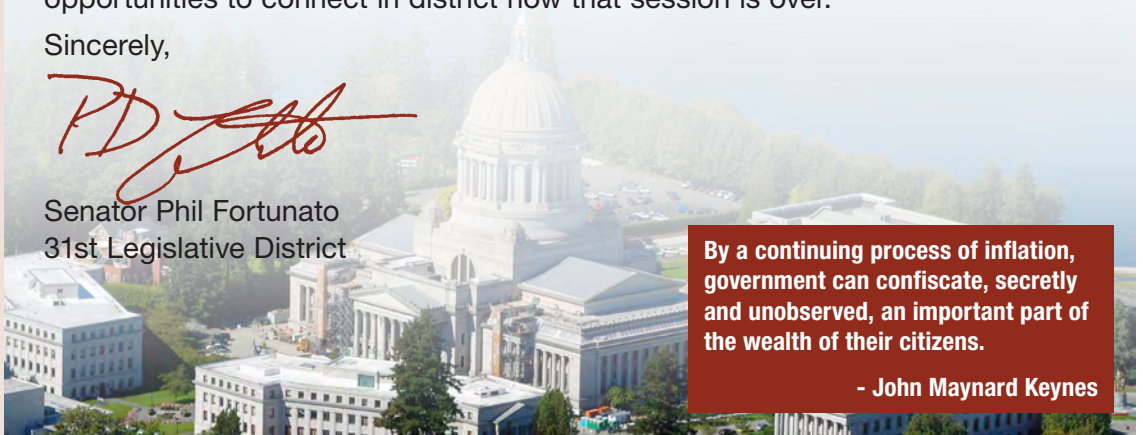
Thank you for the honor to serve as your state senator for the 31st District. I appreciate the input you provide during session and look forward to opportunities to connect in district now that session is over.

Sincerely,

Senator Phil Fortunato
31st Legislative District

By a continuing process of inflation, government can confiscate, secretly and unobserved, an important part of the wealth of their citizens.

- John Maynard Keynes





UNAFFORDABLE WASHINGTON

I mentioned that many policies coming from Olympia are only serving to make our state's affordability problem worse. Housing costs continue to put pressure on household budgets. However, under the guise of environmental protection, the legislative Democrats have made a point to ram through what I call a "Mean Green Agenda." Fortunately, some extreme policies died, such as banning the use of natural gas.

Headlines can be glowing about what nice things the proposals will do for the environment, but the reality is that they are costly schemes that drive up the cost to heat your home, get to work or buy groceries due to regulations, higher taxes, and fees. Consider that with the obscene prices at the pump, new programs to "address climate change," like low carbon fuel standards,

cap and trade (tax) will add an additional \$2.61 cent per gallon when fully implemented.

The transportation package that passed the Legislature costs \$16 billion, paid for with a litany of new and higher fees. I attempted to amend the tax bill for the package to use the existing revenue we already send to Olympia and supported a proposal that would have created a gas-tax holiday from the \$49-cent-per-gallon tax using the extraordinary surplus, saving Washingtonians \$1 billion this year.

When it comes to housing, the artificial restriction of land by the Growth Management Act (GMA) is the single biggest contributor to increased housing costs. The concept of the GMA is to drive up density to make mass transit feasible. Basically, jam as many people as possible into the small an area as possible, to make their lives miserable, so they will take the bus. It's social engineering.

To make matters worse, as the cost of new housing increases, so does the value of existing housing, increasing your property taxes, and pushing new homeownership opportunities out of reach for families.

Nearly every Democrat-proposed policy that has been passed to "fix" the problem only makes it worse. The logic of increasing taxes on housing to make housing more affordable eludes me. Especially when those taxes are used to subsidize expensive government housing.

WHAT TO EXPECT - GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS GONE WRONG

The rate of new government programs added because of the incredible surplus is unsustainable. I predict massive tax increases if the economy slows to pay for all of the environmental and social policies being implemented this year.

Here are some of the most egregious policies from this year:

- Paid Family Leave is \$350,000,000 in the hole. Expect a major tax increase to keep it afloat.
- The long-term care program was bankrupt from the start. Instead of doing the right thing and letting people choose how they pay for care, it's only postponed for two years.
- In addition to the taxpayers funding \$1,101,768,000 in rental assistance caused by the eviction ban, taxpayers are paying an additional \$101,000,000 in utility assistance (to bail out to the power companies).
- Increased property taxes are likely due to the funding of "ghost students." School districts will be able to set levy rates based on the 55,000 students that left the public school system.
- Need free housing? Just camp on the side of the road. The governor's request legislation funded \$90,000,000 for roadside homeless camps. All you need to do to qualify is camp on the side of the road.



VERBAL CAMOUFLAGE

In the Legislature, we use all kinds of terms that might be strange to the average person. That gets even more complicated with what I have been calling "verbal camouflage." These are terms used by many Democratic legislators that leave one scratching their heads for the actual meaning. Here are some examples and what they actually mean.

- "Missing middle" housing – what they really mean is higher density, requiring six-plexes in a single-family neighborhood or accessory dwelling units.
- Person experiencing incarceration – convicted felon
- Unhoused individual – homeless
- Equity – segregation and discrimination based on race



GOVERNOR'S EMERGENCY POWERS

It has been a long fight to try to get the governor to give up his emergency powers. Throughout 2020, I pushed for a first-ever legislative special session to address this issue. Under the state constitution, senators and representatives can call themselves back to Olympia with a two-thirds vote. Since the governor insisted on sidelining us, I thought it was necessary to do a special session. I proposed that we address urgent topics concerning the vaccine mandates, masks in schools, emergency powers and public safety issues. The Senate Democrats' majority leader, however, declined to start the process since his party controls the rules.

Returning power to the people remains elusive since the majority ceded legislative authority to the governor on the first day of the 2021 legislative session.

This year, new procedures were put in place for senators to participate in the legislative process. I objected to them since they placed additional qualifications on office holders that aren't in the constitution. I was escorted out of the Capitol Building on the first day of the 2022 session because I declined to participate in the protocols.

Unsurprisingly, many news outlets missed the point of my objection. The COVID testing release form required me to follow health care directives of the Senate, including hospitalization and treatment if I tested positive. Would you be OK with your employer controlling your medical treatment?

People have a right to make their own medical decisions, and I was certainly not going to follow a politicized protocol when my duties are outlined in the state constitution. If I am not willing to stand up for what I believe in, how can I represent my constituents who may lose their jobs? I sponsored Senate Bill 5144 to ban discrimination and firings based on vaccine status and repeatedly fought for a first ever legislative special session to deal with the mandates and the governor's abuse of emergency powers.

After threatening to do same thing again on the next day, they caved, and the policy was quickly changed. It's a very small win, but a win, nonetheless.

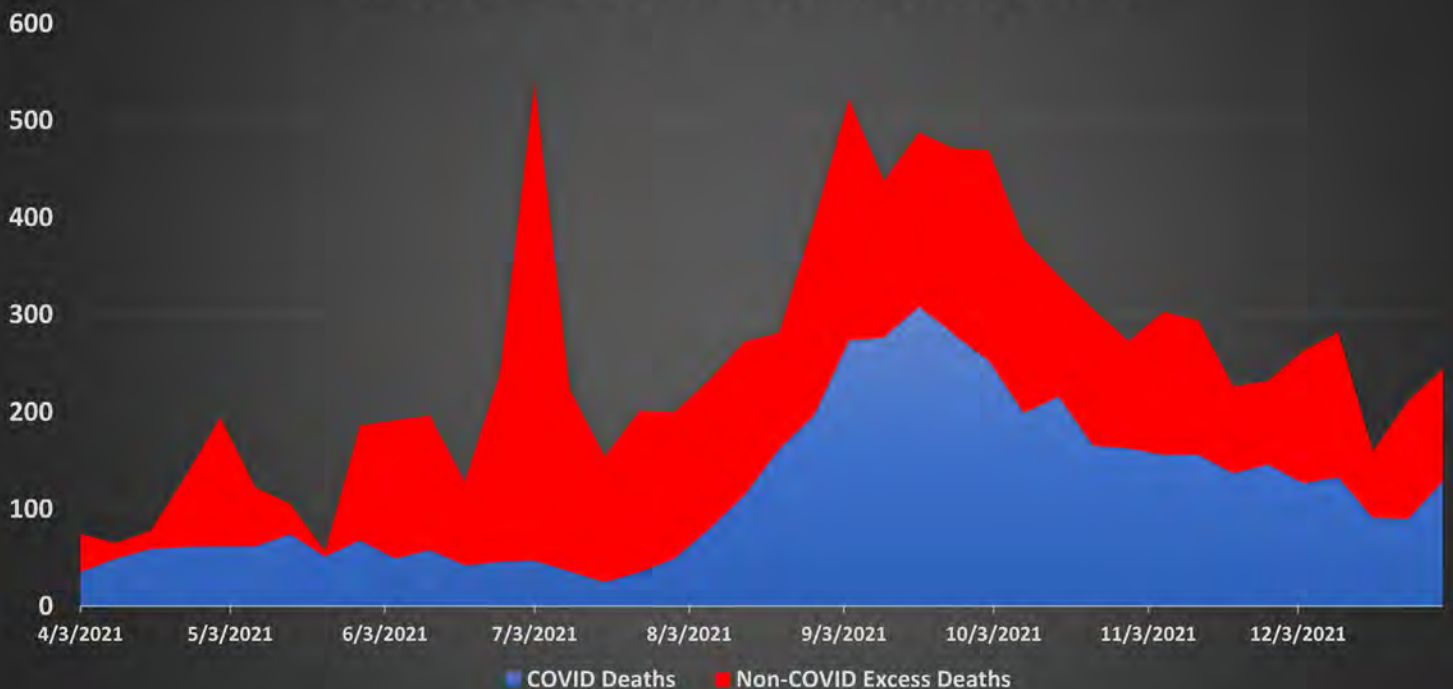
Our governor likes to tout that he's won the COVID Super Bowl, going so far as to say that he was the only one who can save lives using his undemocratic hold on emergency powers. What we are learning now is that these lockdowns were almost entirely unproductive when it came to stopping COVID. They did, however, have lasting, negative consequences for our society. In an unhinged news conference just recently, the governor lambasted Republican legislators for daring to ask that he do what other Democratic governors around the country are doing and return power to the people.

What isn't discussed is the dramatic increase in excess deaths in Washington that were attributable to the isolation, suicide, and drug overdoses. Looking at 2021, the number of non-COVID "deaths of despair" exceeded COVID deaths!

'Emergencies' have always been the pretext on which the safeguards of individual liberty have been eroded.

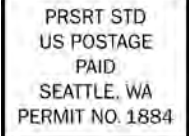
- Friedrich August von Hayek

COVID Deaths vs. Non-COVID Excess Deaths



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31LD

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Town Hall Follow – Up

I recently held two town halls in the district. It was a pleasure to hear from constituents about their hopes, frustrations and needs for our communities. The near two-hour long events were well attended, and we discussed a lot of topics that are outlined below for those of you who couldn't make it.

Taxes – I've fought strenuously for property tax relief since coming to the Senate. If at first you don't succeed, try, try, again. Here are proposals that I've sponsored.

- **SB 5289** – All real property owned by persons 75 years of age or older is exempt from state and local property tax.
- **SB 5290** – Modifies the income eligibility requirement for the senior citizen and persons with disabilities property tax exemption program.
- **SB 5305** – Allows Medicare supplemental insurance premiums to be deducted from the calculation of disposable income for the purpose of qualifying for senior property tax programs.

Homelessness – The state and counties are spending over \$2,000,000,000 on homelessness, but the problem only gets worse. Efforts to address homelessness that included drug and alcohol treatment were opposed by the Democrats because they believe there is no evidence that such a requirement to receive taxpayer funded shelter will help them. There is plenty

of evidence that continued substance abuse and living on our streets hurts them.

Second Amendment Issues – The "assault weapons" ban, which is a made-up term by gun control advocates to instill fear, did not pass. Unfortunately, the magazine ban did pass and was signed into law. The bill did not prohibit possession of magazines, just carrying and use outside the home or range, potentially turning law abiding citizens into criminals with a \$5,000 fine and year in jail. I opposed both of those policies because it puts law abiding citizens at a disadvantage over criminals that aren't going to obey the law anyway.

Law Enforcement & Public Safety – The handcuffing of police is entirely because of the because of legislation promoted by the Democratic majority that were passed last year. This year attempts to fix those problems were largely met with obstruction. A bill to allow police to pursue, passed the House and the Senate but was blocked during the process call "reconciliation," killing the bill.

Election Integrity – The problem we face in election reform is not counting ballots, it is in the registration process itself in effect stuffing the ballot box. I sponsored bills to test the registration process and assign a "unique identifier" that stays with the person regardless of what county they are in.